

Quest for Discovery in the Novels of Anita Nair: A Feministic Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Feminism is by no means a monolithic term at all. When one looks for a specific strand in a number of its variations, it is the critique of patriarchal thought that aims at male dominance and female subordination. This patriarchal ideology teaches women to internalize this concept in a process of socialization. In the wake of feminist movement in India, themes such as women's quest for identity, search for self-hood, relocation of self and consciousness to achieve a balance between tradition and modernity became popular in post-colonial Indian English fiction by both male and female writers. Anita Nair is one of the contemporary writers of India in the 21st Century. Her novels mainly focus on the pathetic lives of women who wriggle in the hands of men. Her works are based on purely Indian background. She has shown the subordinate position of women in the traditional bound Indian society. The existing norms in this society are the hindrances for the rights of women and side-line their existence as human beings.

KEYWORDS: Literature, Women, Freedom, Society, Man-Woman Relationships, Identity, Feminism

INTRODUCTION

Indian women writers explore feminine subjectivity and apply the theme from childhood to complete womanhood. The women writers are doing very well in India and their contribution is immense. The struggle of an Indian woman for her true identity is clear in Indian English novels. The hidden thoughts, feelings, and realization of a woman are found in feminist English novels of India. The Indian women authors have not only exhorted an exposition of patriarchal ideologies and their oppressive to feminist growth and expression, but have also envisioned ways of counteract those attitudes. The images of women need to be rethought and redefined. Indeed, these ideas have brought changes in novelists, especially women writers. Anita Nair's novels represent the contemporary Indian middle class struggle to achieve an autonomous selfhood. Her meditative and psychosomatic settings make her par excellence in revealing her women's characters subconscious and unconscious world of the psyche. She is a twenty first century master artist who is much more vociferous in sharing her fears and concerns regarding women's future in an uncertain world. Her

female protagonists are sensitive, self-conscious, brilliant and imaginative. New women emerge from being a feminist in context of the socio-cultural ethos and values prevailing in the society. The image of a woman and her roles as a mother, a sister, a provider and a grandmother also decides her predicaments and adaptations in her relevant world. Anita Nair, as an Indian woman novelist, focuses on the problems and dilemmas of Indian women in her novels and tries to understand herself in the light of her identity as a wife, mother, provider and, above all, a human being in a tradition-bound ethos and a male dominated society.

Major Thrust

Anita Nair's first novel *The Better Man* has placed her among the Indian novelists who are most self-conscious. At the end of the novel, through her subconscious impulses and the stories of these women, she seeks a solution for her problem as to whether a woman should live by herself, and finally she makes a decision, the turning point of her life. There are men and women in the novel, *The Better Man*, who try to discover their own self and achieve

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happiness. Searching for 'self' is therefore an ongoing process. Anita Nair presents her characters which demonstrate the psychological crisis that they are undergoing in family life. In Mukundan's case in *The Better Man*, he is deeply affected by his father's towering and dominant personality, Achutan Nair. The present research addresses the capacity of the woman to assert her own rights and individuality in marriage and develop into a prospective, full-fledged woman as a human being. She explores the woman's freedom to fulfill herself basically as a human being in the present novel, independent of her various traditional roles as a daughter, wife mother, and so on.

Anita Nair's *The Better Man* is a novel set in the fictional village north of Kerala called Kaikurussi, known in the olden days as Malabar. Kaikurussi village is surrounded by hills. This is, of course, Anita Nair's fictional creation, where most of the novel's action takes place. In the novel there are men and women, who try to discover their self and achieve happiness. Anjana, truly portrayed by Nair, just need to look around to see one of them among us. The thesis further explores that despite many sufferings, ups and downs in Mukundan's life, through self-discovery he finally finds a silver line in the darkness of his life.

The women's journey is not only physical, but also more emotional in nature, at the end of which everyone has a better understanding of themselves. This journey also helps to realize the self and many other things that have not been understood so far. Nair addresses women's issues and addresses all the issues that most women wouldn't dare voice in public. Some of the issues she is dealing with so skilfully are gender bias, desire, male-made society, breaking patriarchal order and much more. All women all around face similar problems. *Ladies Coupe* is a masterpiece by Anita Nair. This novel presents six women's life, all captured up in turbulence of fashion and social order. The patriarchal society in which they are conceived, resides in a variety of hurdles and obstacles in their smooth development. *Ladies Coupe* discusses how the protagonist has been badly affected by such cultural procedures and her powerful determination to remove all obstacles to her own life. A woman, despite all her talents and abilities, has to work twice as hard to prove her identity, and she is least appreciated despite all her struggles and efforts. Marriage is a social institution in which standard existence depends.

Anita Nair plays the role of a social critic, as no writer can isolate herself or himself from society, the violence, the system, the injustice around her. The

novels by such women writers cannot destroy repressive social structures; but by raising questions, suggesting re-assessment and re-thinking, they can help in formulating a consciousness which can ultimately bring about a constructive and healthy change in society. Anita Nair in her novel *Ladies Coupe* through the intimate conversation among the women of the Ladies Coupe portrays a fairly large part of society of all socio-economic levels and age groups. Steeped in the lanes and atmosphere of the city of Bangalore, the novel Cut Like Wound introduces to the reader a host of unforgettable characters and their psychological states in the society. The novel, *Lessons in Forgetting* is a heartwarming story of redemption, forgiveness and second chances. She talks about writing in urban India, the role of a corporate wife as explored in this book. She focuses on the marginal section of society. Her characters revolt against the social set up of society. She manipulates and negotiates for propagating the middle class values. During the course of this journey a subtle cultural transformation has been captured. In Anita Nair's second novel *Ladies Coupe* (2001), Akhilandeshwari alias Akhila is the protagonist. She is a forty five year old spinster. She, after the death of her father, is appointed as an income tax clerk. She belongs to a conservative Tamil Brahmin family. Now she takes up the burden of the entire family on her young shoulders and plays the roles of a daughter, sister, aunt and the bread runner. After some time, she decides to get a one way train ticket to the seaside town of Kanyakumari. On way to Kanyakumari, she meets five other women, listens to their stories in the compartment and tells her too. With the help of the description of six women, the novelist highlights how patriarchy affects the course of a woman's life. In addition, *Mistress* focuses on domestic sexual violence. Though Anita Nair is not a feminist, her stories delve deep into the expectations of married Indian women and the choices they make within the relationships. They are entangled in their suffering and rebellion born of that pain, and convey a message of hope, through the change that is out there and can become possible through one's courage and initiative. Our social and cultural values keep them within the enclosure of traditional social set up. They face injustice and inequality in all walks of life. On the one hand, discussions are carried out about women empowerment; while on the other hand, the novel puts a question mark on the existing education system and social set up of contemporary India.

Conclusion

Anita Nair's major concern emerges from her own environment, from her immediate world, holding up mirror to the India based lives. She critically

examines the various social taboos like marriage taboos, education taboos, rites and rituals, class and caste taboos. She articulates human emotions, the fears and feelings experienced by humans. Her concern about the problems of oppressed and their quest for identity makes one consider her novels as humane and social texts. Her writing is known for courageous and sensitive handling of significant and intractable themes affecting the lives of the oppressed in the class trodden society. Her primary focus of attention is the world of women, the struggle of women in the context of modern Indian society. Her novels depict the real life of her characters. Her novels reveal the effect of social conditioning on women. Society uses many different means to propagate belief we have literature as one of the means to carry these ideas further, surrounded by such messages. They break the chains of social norms and do not confine themselves to the boundaries which limit women. So we can say that Anita Nair breaks the chains of society in portraying her women characters, which usually leads to its fragmentation. She forces us to think of the importance of curbing adultery to save family life. The female characters in Anita Nair's novels come from different religions, reflecting thus the diversity of Indian culture, which would be difficult or- impossible to generalize. Anita Nair is a contemporary Indo-English novelist who has presented the plight of Indian woman. This novel deals with tradition and modernity in the contemporary India. Anita Nair has demonstrated the subordinate position of woman in the orthodox tradition –bound Indian society. She has taken up issues of gender discrimination and social conditioning of women, husband-wife relationship and the suppression of women and sexual exploitation of women within and outside the marital frame.

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